

Senator Harry Kennedy

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Kennedy's Capitol Report

For immediate release: March 15, 2004

Children's mental health services bill signed into law

JEFFERSON CITY — The governor last week signed legislation to broaden and improve Missouri mental health services for children. Senate Bill 1003, which was co-sponsored by Senator Harry Kennedy, D-St. Louis, will allow Medicaid coverage for treatment of children with mental illnesses without requiring parents to relinquish custody to the state.

Previously, the state could only provide long-term mental health care for children who qualified for Medicaid or were in state custody. According to Missouri Department of Social Services estimates, about 560 children have been surrendered to the foster-care system to get treatment for mental illness.

“No parent should have to give up custody of their child just to get them treatment,” Kennedy said. “That’s a horrible situation for the whole family. This legislation is an excellent step toward ensuring that all Missouri children with mental illness receive the help they need.”

The legislation creates a Comprehensive System Management Team, which will include representatives from the Department of Mental Health, the Department of Social Services and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, as well as representatives from child advocacy agencies and family members.

The bipartisan bill was the first bill signed into law during the 2004 legislative session.

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